(d) There were a total of 689 participants including Indian Delegates, Overseas Delegates, Aqua Farm Delegates, Exhibitors, Speakers and invited guests.

(e) and (f) In order to improve the image of Indian marine products further, MPEDA has been taking a number of steps including (i) an intensive publicity campaign in various overseas markets to build up the image of Indian marine products (ii) organising frequent buyer-seller meets so as to create a strong trade relationship; (iii) participation in International fairs; and (iv) inviting overseas experts to visit India and familiarize themselves with the infrastructural developemtns taking place in India.

Meeting of general council of WTO

1868. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the General Council Meeting of the WTO was recently held in Geneva;

(b) whether the long-pending issues of TRIPs and public health were discussed;

(c) what were the other items on the agenda; and

(d) the outcome of the meeting?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ARUN JAITLEY): (a) to (d) A meeting of the WTO General Council was held on 10 February, 2003. The agenda for this meeting included, among others, (i) report from the Chairman of the TRIPS Council on the implementation of paragraph 6 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health; (ii) report by the Chairman of the Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) in Special Session on Special and Differential Treatment in pursuance of paragraph 12.1 of the Doha Ministerial Decision on Implementation-related Issues and Concerns; (iii) report by the Chairman of the Trade Negotiations Committee; (iv) report by the Chairman of the Dedicated Sessions of the CTD on the work programme on small economies; (v) appointment of officers to the various WTO bodies; and (vi) administrative matters relating to the 5th Session of the Ministerial Conference of WTO in Cancun, Mexico in September 2003.

The Chairman of the TRIPS Council presented a brief report on the progress in consultations on implementation of paragraph 6 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration on TRIPS Agreement and Public Health. He stated that the members were actively engaged and that there was a widespread desire to seek a solution. Further, certain momentum had been generated and some ideas were being explored. He requested the General Council to provide some more time to cary on his consultations. In view of this, the General Council agreed to suspend discussion on this item and to revert to this item at a re-convened meeting of the General Council to be held shortly.

At the regular meeting of the TRIPS Council held on 18-20 February 2003, the Chairman reported that he was not in a position to put forward any further suggestions or ideas to bridge the remaining gap in the position of Members and that he would report the state of play on this subject to the Chairman of the General Council, leaving it to his successor to decide on further consultations on this subject.

With regard to other main issues discussed at the 10 February 2003 meeting of the General Council, the outcome was as follows:

(i) Following a broad-ranging exchange of views on a report submitted by the Special Session of the CTD on S and D treatment, and on its recommendations on the follow-up to paragraph 12.1 of the Doha Ministerial Decision on Implementation-Related Issues and Concerns, the General Council took note of the report and of the statements, and invited its Chairman, in coordination with the Chair of the CTD in Special Session, to consult with delegations on how to take this matter forward.

(ii) The Director General of WTO who is the Chairman of the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) gave a report on the TNC's activities since the last meeting.

(iii) The General Council took note of a report from the Chairman of the CTD on the work of the Dedicated Sesions of the CTD regarding the Work Programme on Small Economies.

(iv) The General Council agreed upon a list of Chairpersons for various WTO bodies for the year 2003.

(v) Under the agenda item relating to administrative matters concerning the 5th Session of the Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Cancun in September this year, the General Council, among other issues, agreed that the General Council would submit only a brief update of its Annual Report for the year 2002 describing development since December 2002 instead of a full Annual Report.

Patenting of Indian herbs and medicinal plants by MNCs

†1869. SHRI KRIPAL PARMAR: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some developed countries and multi-national companies have got patented many Indian herbs and medicinal plants;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken by Government in defence of their claim on the Indian herbs and medicinal plants being patented by the other countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI CHENNAMANENI VIDYA SAGAR RAO): (a) to (c) Herbs and medicinal plants, existing in nature, would not meet the criteria of patentability, namely, novelty, inventiveness and industrial applicability. However, patents have reportedly been granted on compositions based on properties of certain herbs/medicinal plants. No such information is maintained as patents are granted under the sovereign prerogative of countries according to their respective patent laws and have territorial effect, that is, they are effective only in the country of grant.

However, as and when information is received about patents being obtained on certain items which are not considered patentable and which affect Indian interests, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of such patent can be challenged under the patent laws of the country concerned. Earlier a patent granted in the United States of America on the use of Turmeric in wound healing was successfully challenged and was also cancelled by the Patent Office of the country concerned. Similarly, a patent on the fungicidal property of neem, granted in Europe,

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.